DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 456 441 CS 217 670

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TITLE	Lessons from the Classroom: What We Learn about Effective Pedagogy from Teacher-Student Interactions.
PUB DATE	2001-07-00
NOTE	28p.; Paper presented at the Joint National Conference of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English and the Australian Literacy Educators' Association (Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, July 12-15, 2001).
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.cdesign.com.au/aate/aate_papers/164_edwards_groves.htm.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Classroom Communication; Elementary Education; *Instructional Effectiveness; *Literacy; Professional Development; *Teacher Behavior; *Teacher Student Relationship; *Verbal Communication

ABSTRACT

Teachers have always understood the critical significance of good teaching to their students' learning. However, the practical question for teachers is what this looks like in actual classroom lessons and how they shape a culture of authentic learning in schools, which prepares young people for tomorrow's world. Essentially, this paper establishes what lessons can be learned about literacy practices by looking at classroom talk. It simply focuses on the efficacy of classroom literacy lessons by assembling the information about what is and can be accomplished by the talk of the classroom and by demystifying the importance of teacher-student interactions through transcript technology. The essential elements of classrooms literacy practice are unpacked and highlighted in terms of its relationship to interactive practices. The topics of talk (what is the focus of the talk in literacy lessons) and the structure of lessons are reviewed. There is a need for teachers to become involved in shaping the directions of change at the fundamental level of practice in the best interests of their students, and so the important implications for professional development are highlighted. (Contains 18 references and several brief transcripts.) (Author/RS)

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by Christine J. Edwards-Groves

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LESSONS FROM THE CLASSROOM: WHAT WE LEARN ABOUT EFFECTIVE PEDAGOGY FROM TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Lessons from the classroom – what can we learn about ourselves, our teaching, and what our students learn, by closely looking at the interactions in the very context in which we work? What does looking at classroom transcripts teach us about effective literacy practices? classroom life? professional growth?

Teachers have always understood the critical significance of good teaching to their student's learning. However the practical question for teachers is what this looks like in actual classroom lessons and how they shape a culture of authentic learning in schools, which prepares young people for tomorrow's world. Essentially, this paper establishes what lessons can be learned about literacy practices by looking at classroom talk. It simply focuses on the efficacy of classroom literacy lessons by assembling the information about what is and can be accomplished by the talk of the classroom and by demystifying the importance of teacher-student interactions through transcript technology. The essential elements of classrooms literacy practice are unpacked and highlighted in terms of its relationship to interactive practices. The topics of talk (what is the focus of the talk in literacy lessons) and the structure of lessons are reviewed. There is a need for teachers to become involved in shaping the directions of change at the fundamental level of practice in the best interests of their students, and so the important implications for professional development are highlighted.

KEY WORDS

Classroom Interaction, Literacy Teaching, Lessons, Explicit Teaching, Principles, Professional Development

INTRODUCTION

Effective teaching and learning of literacy is a primary matter of concern for contemporary Australian society and one leading much of the educational discourse into this century. Teachers in the day-to-day reality of the classroom are constantly faced with the challenge of designing and implementing quality literacy instruction. Although we all come to this task with a core ambition to improve students' literacy learning outcomes that will ensure a literate future, the complexities of classroom life and the demands of new curriculum and policy continually confront, and sometimes override, these everyday teaching and learning encounters. What we teach, how we teach it and how well we teach are main issues that have led to decades of widespread debate. The perennial recurrence of the debate has led educational administrations at the levels of state, system and school to respond to this challenge in a number of ways.

Recently, in response to this issue, particular government bodies have commissioned reviews to report on the expectations and directions of teacher education and provide recommendations to improve the quality of pedagogy (see eg, *Quality Matters-Revitalising Teachers: Critical times, critical choices*, Ramsey, NSW, 2000). The formulation of specific guidelines describing the principles and practices underpinning effective learning and teaching, for example, have also been promoted in the documentation of many education systems across Australia over the past decade (see eg, *Principles of Effective Learning and Teaching*, Dep of QLD, 1994; *Today's Children: Tomorrow's Adults*, Wagga Wagga Diocese, NSW, 2000). Clearly these documents have been based on synthesising studies about teacher efficacy and professionalism. They were prepared to guide the pedagogical practices of teachers in the implementation of quality teaching and learning in schools and to assist teachers in their role of shaping the future of the children they teach. Whilst they were designed to acknowledge the

multiplicity, the complexity and the dynamic nature of the learning and teaching process and its context, such publications or even the principles, in themselves, are not sufficient to improve classroom literacy practices. In the past such documentation, curriculum change and government publications or even mandates have demonstrated change is possible at the level of the educational rhetoric but the quality of literacy teaching practices in classrooms have remained unchanged and the issue of efficacy has stayed high on the educational agenda (Kyrakiades, 1997). Why? Perhaps teachers have not been supported to focus professional improvement at the micro level of practice: the level of talk.

In a practical sense looking at the level of talk, described by Anstey (1996) as the 'micro' level of classroom practice, a picture of what constitutes effective teaching and learning is made available which can justifiably act as a springboard for focused educational change. Although the issue of classroom interaction has emerged to be a pivotal topic in discussions relating to explicit and effective instruction in many educational forums, they have yet to move into the professional development arena for teachers in any significant way. Consequently we are forced to ask ourselves to assess the critical components for the future path of our profession that will focus on how to support, improve and maintain teacher quality and professionalism. In my view, what is critically and fundamentally needed is for teachers themselves to focus pedagogical change at the micro level of the lesson: the level of their teacher-student interactions.

CURRENT RESEARCH

Research such as the well-documented study by Freebody, Ludwig and Gunn (1995), "*Everyday Literacy Practices in and out of School in Low Socio-economic Urban Communities*" has paved the way for understanding the implications of teacher-student interactions in Australian classrooms. This research has not only captured the essence of the ever-increasing diversity among teachers and students, but importantly it provides a background to classroom interactive practices typically found in Australian classrooms across a range of settings. Current educational media have taken up the reported findings in a range of contexts to inform the future directions of learning and teaching in this

country. My own study has taken these findings into the professional development arena by working collaboratively with teachers in a way that focused their thinking on the relationship between their own classroom interactive practices and effective pedagogy (Edwards-Groves, 1998).

Transcripts of Interaction Assist Teacher change

For the group of teachers in my research, the patterns of interactions they observed in their own classrooms (through examining transcript data and focused reflection) in fact acted as a motivation for professional improvement and change. Critically, looking at their classroom interaction patterns showed them the details of the topic and management structures of their literacy lessons. Specifically it captured what they set up to be of primary importance in literacy lessons by displaying what topics were the main point of the lesson, how the 'lessons' progressed, what their students 'heard' to be the focal point of the lesson and how 'lessons' are concluded, what was made explicit, and what was left implicit. In particular it was shown that systematic and explicit pedagogy, major components of effective teaching, were absent or inconsistent with their beliefs about their practice and about effective practice; a revelation that acted as a springboard for interactional change for this group.

Typical of the comments made by the teachers after reviewing their own lessons is this view from a Year 4 teacher:

Having cooperative classrooms and being partners in learning have always been important, yet explicit teaching as an effective teaching practice is a very basic area in which this ideal has been lacking. Until I looked at transcripts of my own lessons I thought I conducted focused teaching and learning. I realised I didn't really understand what it meant for the children. No one seems to have picked up on that and that's why it came as a surprise to me that I wasn't doing it. It hit me as a powerful way of creating an inclusive educational environment that puts kids at the centre of the learning. We expect that children are to be partners in developing self-discipline for example, we sit them down and fully discuss expectations and implications, we allow them in on that, but I

believe we haven't taken it that step further towards fully allowing them in on their own learning. Learning about my own effectiveness as a teacher in relation to explicit teaching and classroom interaction is now a fairly big area of professional development for me and I learnt it by looking at my own lesson transcripts.

Year 4 Classroom Teacher

Recognised here is the point that focused review of your own teaching practice (via transcript technology) enables teachers to make clear statements about the effectiveness of their own work. These teachers redefined their view of what a literacy lesson should look like and strongly suggest the importance of this information for all teachers. Explicitly prioritising student learning by changing their interactive practices resulted. Further, the "*Quality Teaching Project 1.8: Literacy Learning and Teaching in the Classroom*" in my local region has recently taken up aspects of this information to go beyond curriculum, resources and strategies to provide professional development focused on the importance of classroom interaction. This program used the information developed by my research group develop understandings at the fundamental level of practice (the level of talk) by directly relating to the effectiveness of their interactive practices and its relationship to quality teaching and learning. Collaborative professional development programs incorporating in-class support and focused reflection and lesson evaluation orients individual teachers toward specifically improving their interactive practices in relation to their understandings. This approach forms a principled program of improvement that assists teachers make well-informed choices about learning and how to be better teachers rather than 'a hope for the best' approach reflected by a one-size-fits-all professional development program.

This presentation blends what theorists say, what teachers say and what classroom practice looks like. It takes the main points of my study to draw attention to effective teaching and learning practices by examining teacher-student interactions within the context of classroom literacy lessons. The *lessons* these teachers learned have implications for the learning and teaching practices for all teachers. Pushing the boundaries to encompass the significance of classroom interactions aims to shift our

current understandings of what constitutes effective literacy pedagogy in today's classrooms. The interrelated themes of classroom literacy lessons, effective pedagogy and teacher-student interactions are utilised to address these main questions:

- What constitutes a literacy lesson? What is the role of classroom talk?
- What lessons do our students learn in our classrooms?
- What lessons can we learn about literacy teaching practices?
- What are the implications for professional development?

TALK WITHIN THE CLASSROOM CREATES THE SOCIAL AND LEARNING CONTEXT

Let's turn to the classroom as a starting point. Classrooms provide the interactive and physical context for student learning. All classrooms share one thing in common - they are unique social sites in that the distinctive nature of the classroom situation demands that teaching and learning happen whilst simultaneously constructing roles and relationships between teachers and students. Teachers and students create, through talk, the social classroom context on which they rely to support instructional talk. They use their knowledge of that context to generate appropriate behaviour, and the appropriateness of that behaviour, in turn, serves to define the context in which they interact (Edwards and Furlong, 1979). Students learn the way of the school by participating in it.

Studies of both how classrooms work and of literacy practices within the classroom context give attention to the organisation of classroom discourse whilst providing descriptions of effective practices. These studies offer a powerful way of showing the development of classrooms as a unique social culture and the situated construction of literacy practices through the life of the classroom (Edwards and Furlong, 1979; Willes, 1983; Heap, 1985, 1992; Baker & Freebody, 1989; Gee, 1990; Baker, 1991; Anstey1993, 1996; Freebody, Ludwig and Gunn, 1995).

Lessons as an interactive event: What is accomplished by classroom talk? What lessons do our students learn?

Classroom talk is distinctive and easily recognisable. Transcripts of classroom interaction, such as the one below, clearly demonstrate that classrooms provide the both interactive and physical context for school learning. This context affords a highly complex set of interpersonal interactions that serve to simultaneously assemble the social relationships between teacher and student as it organises student learning, a relationship well documented (Baker & Freebody, 1989; Baker, 1991; Edwards-Groves, 1998, Freebody, Ludwig and Gunn, 1995; Luke 1995). Talk shapes the context (the culture of the classroom), organises students for learning and the learning itself.

Teacher: What we're talking about is what we did on the weekend. Now I've already told you I went skiing and stuff like that on the weekend as well, but, also I watched some TV shows. Hands up if you watched TV on the weekend? (Children put hands up) Whatya watch James?
James: Ah, Umm/
Teacher: /Whatcha watch, Lucy? Did you watch any television on the weekend?
Lucy: Cartoons

Transcripts, such as this, demonstrate how talk is at the core of the interpersonal, social and intellectual relationships between teachers and students within the context of the classroom. What is talked about or learned (*what we did on the weekend*) is inextricably linked with cultural social organisations of the classroom (*hands up* and *nominating turns at talk*). We learn that classroom talk is a main tool for teaching, for thinking and for learning. It is an entry into written language and the main way in which students encounter and learn about the ways or the culture of the school (Baker & Freebody, 1989). Regardless of what texts or curriculum documents are used for example, it is through the talk and patterns of interaction that the learning is enacted and made visible.

The effectiveness of the classroom teaching and learning practices hinges on the effectiveness of the interaction practices. In order to identify what is learnt by our students it is necessary to establish ***what*** teachers talk about and ***how*** students hear what the lesson is about; that is, how they mutually engage the literacy through their interactions. To illustrate this it is necessary to look at classroom lessons via transcript technology, which helps teachers to interpret their everyday teaching and learning routines, instructional focus, establish what is effective and ultimately, what is achieved by classroom talk. They show what happens in classrooms, and how literacy events unfold. Reading the transcripts enabled the teachers to 'work over' the lesson (transcript or taped lesson) for what it revealed on a moment-by-moment, turn-by-turn basis. They allow us to reflect in a focused way about whether similar or different approaches might be useful for student learning in future lessons. Significantly, what the group of teachers in my study learned reflected main findings from other research (eg, Freebody, Ludwig and Gunn, 1995) but they collaboratively supported in taking this new knowledge back to their practice. Their learning shaped the future directions for learning and teaching in their classrooms.

What teachers can learn about literacy lessons?

If we look through the door of any classroom, what do we notice to be going on? What lessons are taking place? What do we understand a lesson to be? Although on the surface these appear to be quite banal questions, we must look deeply at our understandings and what has shaped them. When we think about what we understand a lesson to be our immediate thoughts turn first to the teaching and learning of aspects of literacy. We might even simply say lessons are about teaching and learning. However, we need to look deeper at the fundamental level of practice. Lessons first and foremost are an evolving interactive process.

Lesson Beginnings

As a starting point we examine how some lessons begin will be. The beginning of the lesson is the foundation stone from where the learning is built. It importantly is the point where the learning is put centre stage and has the power of influencing the successful progression of the learning event for our students. Starting lessons effectively must be a priority for all teachers. It sets the scene, so that all students are focusing on the purposes and processes for learning and establishes the context in which this learning will take place. Looking at task introductions of the following literacy lessons shows the topics teachers set up as the main point for students to focus thinking and activity.

In reviewing their practice the teachers learned that what counts as the main topic in a lesson for students may be any number of things, and it is the responsibility of the teaching to make specific learning intentions clear at the beginning of the lesson for all students to hear. And the instructional focus needs to be maintained throughout the learning event. Students do not have access to the lesson purpose unless it is clearly, and publicly, set out for them from the onset of the learning and maintained throughout the lesson. These aspects of teaching draw attention to the importance of classroom interaction as being the pivotal resource for effective teaching. How teachers set up the learning context through their talk can be a primary indicator of lesson effectiveness.

Transcript 1: Year 4/5/6:Learning purpose (nominated prior to lesson): Writing a news report (post-intervention transcript)	
T: Today we are continuing on with our work on News Reports we are actually going to be learning how to write some (5.0). We've learnt there's lots of different types of news reports, can be in the paper, can be on the radio, can be in a magazine, could be on TV and they're all written the same way. Did you know that - Jemima? There all written following a certain pattern, today we are going to look at some newspaper reports to find out about that pattern……	Students clearly 'heard' is that the lesson is about learning to write 'newspaper reports'. The literacy topic was clearly presented as the focus for thinking and learning about.

In comparison, the next example shows the focal topic of talk was the classroom theme 'insects'. The teacher explicitly foregrounded this lesson to be about 'praying mantis'. The introductory statement 'How could we give those praying mantis's a drink? (see turn 1) lead students to think about praying mantis's as the primary topic of the lesson. There was no orientation to specific literacy learning, or even to the teacher's intended purpose in this instance.

Transcript 2: Year 2/3/4-Learning purpose (nominated prior to lesson): How to write a science report using a Shared Reading Text	
1.T: **How could we give those praying mantis a drink, Kyle what do you think?** 2.Kyle: We could get a container dig a hole in the dirt and stick that in 3.T: Right[4.Kyle: And fill up with water 5.T: Right and that wouldn't be a bad idea actually would it, but of course the trouble is, what might happen when people putting insects into the container	From the onset of this reading lesson the major topic of talk was about insects. At times there was a shift to discussing terrariums, the water-cycle and evaporation. At no point in the 45 minute opening segment of talk was the purpose of the lesson *writing science reports* introduced.

Effective teachers prepare the learning path by explicating instructional goals and the lesson rationale by paying careful attention to *what* we talk about in lesson. It is an essential characteristic of effective teaching and learning practice. What we can learn from this excerpt is the importance of clearly orienting students to specific learning outcomes. Whilst at times thematic talk is appropriate for some lesson purposes, we need to be mindful that if themes and texts are 'announced' as the topic for talk then the intended learning purposes are blurred. Themes and text need to treated as the vehicles through which learning literacy outcomes are achieved. Children are less able to understand the object of the lesson, and thus able to achieve it, when unable to discern whether the teacher's talk relates to:

- the learning purposes of the lesson
- classroom management or organisation, or
- general 'everyday culturally familiar' experiences or thematic topics

Essential Focused links within Lessons

Turning to the way lessons are maintained, concluded and reviewed, teachers learnt how explicit links between lesson introductions, lesson purposes, instructional sequences and lesson conclusions are necessary. Maintaining the literacy focus works toward maximising students encounters with the objective of the lesson and ensures the lesson counted as valuable literacy learning. Many lessons in my sample however, showed the talk to be regularly shifting from literacy to 'everyday' familiar themes in an 'incidental' or even ad hoc fashion. Rather than maintaining the literacy focus routine digressions into other topics emerged as a regular teaching practice.

By observing lesson conclusions we can learn how this feature of an effective literacy lesson enables connections to be made to lesson purposes. Typically, however, these were absent in the lessons from my sample, these simply concluded with 'wrap-up' statements. For this group of teachers lessons initially stopped abruptly without orientation to the literacy learning objectives of the lesson or review of the primary lesson points. The lesson conclusions were simply a signal to 'pack up', rather than treated as an opportunity to harness and review specific learning.

Transcript 3: Year 2/3: Learning purpose : Comprehension sheet, doing a CLOZE.	
Teacher: Okay, Okay, come on. ***Please sit down, that's enough of that****, I think, you're getting a bit noisy, I hope you're finished that sheet otherwise you can do it for homework. ((Background chatter)).*	The lesson concluded with a brief signal and a remark orienting to the production of work - *I hope you're finished that sheet* indicating to students that completing the task was the primary concern. There was no links made to learning about literacy.

What we learn by these examples is that talk, with the specific purpose to review or summarise specific aspects of learning, is a feature of effective teaching. It emerged to be considered by these teachers as a significant way to connect the learning purposes to learning outcomes for students. These teachers recognised this and made statements such as:

Remembering to allow time in the lesson for a review of learning is a big area of change for me. I recognised its relevance and importance to the whole lesson as soon as I realised it wasn't a part of my lessons at all.

Year 2/3 Classroom Teacher

Time for review of literacy learning at the end of lessons needs to be considered as an integral part of the lesson. Consider this excerpt where literacy outcomes were explicitly connected to what was happening in the lesson and at the end of the lesson. The teacher acknowledged the importance of the 'lesson review' (see the comments below).

Transcript 4: Year 4/5/6: Learning purpose: Writing news reports	
434 T: Ok, before we move on to our reading let's re-cap on what we have been learning. There was a pattern that is in most news reports that we have been learning about. Give me a "w" word that we use when we're writing news reports, Phillipa? ((Pause)) There's five to choose from.	In this lesson conclusion the teacher focuses the talk on what was learnt about this lesson. It clearly relates what aspect of literacy learning was the main point of the lesson. This feature seen here was motivated by its absence in previous classroom lessons.

The lesson review provides us with information about what needs reteaching.. gives you direction as to which children understand.. formative assessment ..used for future planning...engages the learners in the total learning process.. enables a system of independent self-evaluation, where the children can clearly articulate their own learning in relation to the stated focus....it's a partnership in evaluation because they know what

was expected and they can see how they were able to demonstrate it, and how well they understood or learnt it.

Year 4 Classroom Teacher

A lesson is not the activity or task, nor is it the texts or resources we use, it is not the teaching program, the syllabus or its prescripted outcomes, nor is it the groups we arrange or the even the product of activity. These elements impact on what we talk about in a 'lesson', but primarily they are vehicles that are utilised in the process of interaction. Clearly, the partnership between teaching and learning and teacher and learner is forged by the talk of the classroom. *Transcript 5* shows how the focus (or topic) of classroom talk often has a tenuous relationship to student learning of specified outcomes.

Transcript 5: Year 4 Learning purpose - Learning how to spell the list words	
304 T: …Piglets, lets look at that word. Now as we said a moment ago, young pigs are called? 305 Ss:Piglets 306 T: There's a very famous piglet, in books 307 S: I know 308 T: Who is it? 309 S: Babe 310 T: Ohh I wasn't thinking of Babe but that's not a bad answer is it? I was thinking of another piglet, and Babe has beaten us all, Babe started of as a piglet then grew into a pig - 311 S: And he was//	Within this part of the spelling lesson, the talk here turned to a 20 minute discussion on "Babe" the movie. Talk centred pigs, the site where the film was made, sheep dogs and so on. At no point in the lesson was 'how to spell 'piglets' approached in any significant way. Such school routines appear to be taken up as a 'good thing to talk about' and are often viewed by the teachers as in inclusive approach

312 T: //Uhh 313S: Piglet out of Winnie the Pooh 314 T: Yes the piglet in Winnie the Pooh was what I was thinking of, but that's a good answer Babe, I'll have to accept that one, seeing as, has anyone seen Babe?.....	(and possibly treated as a deliberate digression by the students).

In viewing lessons like this from a socio-cultural perspective we need to continually ask ourselves '*what messages are we leaving our students with?'* What the students learn here is that talk about 'themes' or everyday familiar topics (a term used by Freebody & Frieberg, 1995) is the primary focus, they learn that learning how to spell means successfully participating in such topical talk. . The everyday conversational topic 'farm animals' appear to drive the lesson, and often, references to literacy learning is incidental or implicit. After this lesson the teacher described this discussion as '*terrific because all the kids were involved'*. However after reading the transcript, the teacher shifted his view on what went on, to say:

In reading my transcripts I thought 'where is the literacy learning'? I think we were encouraged to let lessons go off onto any tangent. Letting the topic go in any direction was seen as good, but I don't allow that to happen now. Now, what the findings have shown me is that I have permission to say 'Okay that's not really what we are talking about now, we are actually talking about such and such'. And that's a way of reinforcing what learning is actually going on and getting the children back on track and not to digress into talking about all these other topics. You don't let the children's minds waft and wander around onto irrelevant topics, they keep focused and on track, and on learning about specific aspects of literacy.

Year 4 Classroom Teacher

What messages are leaving with students?

The social organisations and interactions encountered in 'lessons' in reading and writing enables children to become acculturated into being 'literate' in the everyday world. In the same sense, students learn that particular social and organisational routines are associated with becoming literate. Complying with school routines (eg, hands up, one speaker at a time, turn taking) are often prioritised as they are learning about aspects of literacy (eg, concepts of print, phonemic awareness, text types, spelling and vocabulary, word processing, writing, skimming, scanning, summarising, topic sentences etc). The transcript example below shows how participation in the 'lesson' requires student compliance with the interactive routines or patterns of the classroom.

Transcript 4: Year 1 Learning purpose - Learning about text characters from *"Mrs Wishy Washy"*	
T: Okay lets have a look at this picture here, up here on this page. Here we have those naughty characters, and aren't they getting into an awful mess. ((Background chatter12.0)) Sitting down everyone, get in a spot where you can see. ((Children shuffling around)) Right, who are the characters in this story, those messy// *Mitchell: //Pig, the duck* *T: Oh no,* ***you don't call out when we're doing our reading*** *Mitchell. We've got to what? Carmon?* *Carmon: Put our hands up* *T: Yes, what else, yes?* *S: wait your turn* **T: Wait your turn, good/**	Within this part of a book reading lesson, school routines and participation rights (waiting to be nominated for a turn to talk, not calling out and hands up) are clearly understood by teachers and students. And this is made clear and understood, by teacher and children, when they establish that 'we don't call out and put hands up when we do reading'. Doing

S: /don't call out *T: Good boy, yes, that's right when we're doing our reading groups please remember those important Year 1 rules in our reading; no calling out, hands up and waiting for your turn. Now, back to the picture, who are these messy characters here? Oh look here……*	'school reading' means behaving in a particular way.

Transcript 4 clearly shows that the culture of the classroom evolves through the talk. It demonstrates that literacy learning is embedded within particular school routines and patterns of interactive participation. It shows how students are typically drawn into being interactive participants in their lessons; they comply with the interactive 'norms' constructed by teachers. What is 'heard' by the students is that this lesson is about complying with important Year 1 rules. And if they don't, it is made clear that '*no calling out, hands up and waiting for your turn*' are associated with learning to read. The lesson here is that the children will learn how to participate appropriately in order to achieve literacy success – one clearly hinges on the other. Students participate in constructing classroom interactions and consequently participate in teaching and in their own learning.

When classroom learning is only loosely related to a focused set of literacy objectives, students experience a blurring of objectives that make it difficult for them to know what is required of them cognitively. Examination of classroom literacy practice has shown that in many classrooms, explicit teaching almost routinely directed to developing classroom participation skills and behaviour rather than to developing specific literacy knowledge and skills. As a result the learning task becomes a secondary concern as management and organisation are given priority.

Successful participation in literacy learning is often shown by teachers to rely on the successful participation in classroom organisational routines. Students learn that literacy learning is therefore linked to behaving in a particular way in classrooms, and so it is within *school type talk* literacy learning is achieved. Furthermore, in the same sense, successful participation in school routines is often taken by teachers to be successful

teaching and learning. For example, if children are behaving appropriately and successfully engaging in the participation routines like 'hands up and no calling out' then *learning* has taken place and the lesson is deemed 'successful'. We often consider the child who is complying with these classroom norms to be the 'best learners'. Importantly, from a socio-cultural perspective, this only demonstrates the students are successfully engaging in a particular interactive routine, not in learning about literacy.

Many shifts to attend to logistical management issues in the classroom suspend the focus of the pedagogy from literacy learning to behaviour management. "*Lessons for all*" is an interactive management strategy that routinely serves to teach all students about the right way to behave (consider the example below as a lesson about 'litter' is given). Everyday management of classrooms is necessary and it is not practical to suggest that teachers should not attend to behaviour. But teachers are asked to think about management as potential interruption to the learning and successful achievement of literacy outcomes. The possibility of individualisation of behaviour management should be considered so that orientations to management do not override the learning focus. A strong sense of moral order should not dominate the talk of the classroom to such an extent that the learning focus is masked.

Transcript 6 Year 4: Learning purpose (nominated prior to lesson) - Reading groups	
T: //Right Good. I want you to go back and find those four answers, …….. Look, Don't worry what someone else is doing Gary. See those pieces that fall down there you were told to put them somewhere. You'll be telling me tomorrow you can't find them. Trim them up and stick them in your book somewhere, put them in loosely. All these little bits and pieces of rubbish I want you to put them in the correct place now. Remember everyone its litter if its lying around,(the ground) and it its put in rubbish bin it's not litter, it's	This lengthy segment demonstrates the way a literacy focus is suspended to attend to managerial issues. The *pep talk* (the lesson about rubbish) reflects a local moral order and issues comment strong on acceptable student

garbage, there's a difference. You must learn that. Now, Ari go back to your desk and get to work.((Student moving to put rubbish in bins)). Everybody seated and mouths turned off when you're doing reading groups. I'm going to speak to one group at a time and I don't want to be interrupted Kate. When I come to your group, be ready to participate and cooperate and join in. Now back to work …….	behaviour (what you must learn in order to participate) were the main thrust of many segments of talk in this classroom.

The teacher made these observations about this type of lesson excerpt:

I see that the management of behaviour can really run in and take away a lot of valuable time from actual teaching learning. It's not until you actually observe yourself, and look at those transcripts from a child's point of view that you see how has this affected lesson continuity for them. If you think about how has this lesson progressed in the child's eyes, I realised that talk relating to behaviour management was more of an issue and more widespread than what I would have thought before. I can actually see the impact on the success of the lesson in terms of how the learning is being interrupted.

Year 4 Classroom Teacher

The social organisation of classrooms through talk relates to how much of the learning space is taken up with attending to behaviour and management issues. The teacher comments challenge us to address attention to behaviour as an issue that specifically relates to effective student learning. It is an issue that has the potential to interrupt the flow of the lesson and consequently the learning. We need to consider these questions:

- *Is the whole class called away from the learning task to attend to every misdemeanour?*
- *Does the lesson focus shift from literacy learning to becoming a lesson on the 'right way to behave', whereby a strong sense of moral order is a main concern?*
- *How regularly does management talk cut across the instruction?*

- *Are orientations to student behaviour formalised and systematic, or informal and incidental?*
- *Is a particular 'pep-talk' system of behaviour recruited to manage student behaviour?*
- *Is the whole class called to attention when behavioural issues are addressed in class?*
- *Does one indiscretion call for 'a-lesson-for-all' in how to behave correctly?*

The literacy learning must remain the focal topic of talk in any lesson and what is to be learnt needs to remain a primary concern. Care must be taken not to blur the learning objective by calling for whole class attention to address issues related to behaviour. Significantly, meaningful learning comes from meaningful talk. If we focus our talk on specific aspects of literacy, we focus our instruction. Therefore we need to be mindful of what we focus our interaction on – the learning outcomes? the texts? the resources? the theme? the groups? the activity? the product? the behaviour of students?

WHAT LESSONS ABOUT LITERACY TEACHING PRACTICES CAN TEACHERS LEARN FROM ANALYSING TALK? IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Talk in classrooms has different purposes. However, 'lesson talk' must be largely instructional rather than conversational. By reviewing their own lesson transcripts the teachers in my research reconceptualized their understandings of 'what constitutes a lesson' and their comments provide compelling accounts of the importance of classroom interaction, explicit teaching and their impact on student learning. This comment illustrates this shift in understanding:

I now know that a lesson really relies on more than the syllabus, or the books or the activities I planned. It is more about how I interact with my students, how I engage students in their learning through my talk. I didn't realise the importance of it until I

looked at my transcripts. I now continually listen to myself and ask 'what did the kids hear?' and 'is that what I want them to focus on?'

Year 4/5/6Teacher

Specifically orienting to classroom talk has significant implications for professional development, a point highlighted by the teachers in my own study. Although it is important for teachers to acknowledge and understand the role of theory in professional development, it is more critical for the change enterprise to begin at the fundamental level of the classroom – the level of talk. There is a need to extend teacher knowledge about the role of classroom interactions so that they can refocus delivery to be about specific literacy learning.

The power of focused reflection and review

Purposeful reflection and review of the interactions in our classrooms partly moves us toward addressing the effective approaches to professional development. This will advance and inform our thinking to improve our pedagogical practice. For example the clarity and availability of the purpose for literacy instruction effects the successful progression of literacy lessons. Hence we clearly need to provide systematic patterns of explication, as confusion about the specific nature of the task is exemplified when this is not evident. The power of focused reflection is clearly oriented to here, when this teacher exemplifies the importance of explicating the lesson focus in relation to her own learning:

The explication of the lesson focus is such a very basic thing to do but it is something that has been missed out along the way from my lessons. It is important to me as a learner, when I go to a meeting or an in-service I like to have a structure placed before me so that I know what are the expected outcomes of the session so that I can just internalise more about what is happening. I need to know where we're leading so that I can develop and build on to what I already know...and presume it is the same for children. I think that they need to have the security of knowing what is going on, they then can become better learners and evaluators of their own learning

Year 4 Classroom Teacher

The efficacy of our literacy instruction is located within the parameters of the talk encounters in our classrooms. In essence classroom interaction is linked to effective classroom literacy practices and we therefore are compelled to question the interactive practices in our classroom. Focused reflection of this context – the classroom literacy lesson - enables a redefinition what teachers know and understand about effective pedagogy that is directly related to their classroom literacy practices. Teachers need to have the opportunity to take a step back and review practices in a focused way. They need to know what to think about and to focus on in order to improve; it is difficult doing this 'on the run' as a player (as an interactive participant in the classroom). The importance of teacher self-reflection cannot be underestimated. Teachers need to recognise that reflecting on their own practice in a systematic way can lead to a more explicitly focused learning environment, as pointed out by this teacher:

Looking at transcripts of my own lessons forced me to think about what I am doing and why, in a very focused way, something I would not normally have the chance to do. If we are serious about improving our practice then I think all teachers should reflect on their practice in relation to the classroom talk, especially on how they set up their lessons and about what our kids are actually learning…

Year 4 Classroom Teacher

The following questions provide a guide, but no detail, as to how teachers can review the effectiveness of their own work. They are useful in applying them to current teaching practice. (Examination and observation of actual and recorded lessons and lesson transcripts provide the necessary detail.) Therefore using focused reflection (see questions below) as an approach guides teachers to orient to specific aspects of their work. It keys them in to thinking about meaningful learning through meaningful interaction.

FOCUSED REFLECTION ON TEACHING

- ***How do we construct literacy lessons? What is foregrounded at the beginning of a lesson (what do we say the lesson is about)?***
- ***What do we talk mainly about? What is made explicit in our lessons?***
- ***Do our students 'hear' and understand what the lesson is about in relation to specific literacy learning?***
- ***Does our talk fully engage learners in their learning?***
- ***What literacy learning is left implicit, to be learnt incidentally?***
- ***What learning is made transferable to other situations? What learning remains trapped within a single lesson?***
- ***Do we treat texts, themes, activities and resources as vehicles in which specific literacy learning can emerge successfully? Or are they the primary focus?***
- ***Are we accomplishing what we are setting out to teach? How do we know?***
- ***Do we conclude lessons with connections to literacy learning?***
- ***Do students orient to learning, to aspects of literacy in their talk?***
- ***Does the management of behaviour cut into the learning?***

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The importance of interactive practices (and what lessons can be learned from observing them) need to be stated both within and outside the boundaries of traditional points of focus for programs of professional development, such as curriculum, resources and 'strategies'. In seeking to improve the efficacy of current teaching and learning practices it is necessary for teachers to locate literacy pedagogy within its social context. Without supporting teachers with a clear picture of what effective pedagogy looks like or sounds like in the "everyday" classroom lesson, teachers will be left to ask "what does this mean to me in my classroom, for my teaching, for my group of children?"

CONCLUSION

Just as definitions of literacy are evolving – so too is the nature of teaching it and the understandings and knowledge of effective pedagogy. In seeking answers to questions about the efficacy of current teaching and learning practices, theorists and educationalists are turning to viewing classroom practice through the lens of ethnography because, critically as shown in my study, it provides a detailed picture of the nature of teaching within its context. In particular, over the past decade such ethnomethodological accounts of teaching have evolved that have informed and re-shaped traditional understandings of what constitutes effective practice by going beyond simple the surface level descriptions of it. We need to use these accounts of "what is effective classroom practice that focus on classroom talk" to shape the directions of future effective pedagogy. Focused educational change that aims to improve the quality of classroom interactions, supports both teachers in their teaching context and students in their learning.

Just as teachers want guarantees about the quality of further learning opportunities made available to them, so too should the teaching community provide these guarantees for students – we need to guarantee how well our students are being prepared for their future by reconnecting teaching with learning. We want our lessons to be ones worth learning, and we can guarantee this by explicitly harnessing all opportunities for effective literacy learning.

What is suggested in this paper is that taking teachers back to the micro-level of practice is an approach that plays a fundamental role in answering questions about effective classroom literacy practices; one that must be made available to educators at all levels of service and a critical starting point for their professional journey of renewal and growth. Unless we look deeply beyond the surface of classroom teaching and view the interactive practices that unfold in the context of any lesson, our understandings about effective pedagogy and teacher change will simply remain at the surface level. It is suggested here that a new direction for understanding the effectiveness of our classroom literacy practices in relation to classroom interaction be launched as a priority for ongoing professional development. This approach accounts for meaningful learning through meaningful interactions. This will lead to meaningful futures for our young people on their journey.

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